

CLASS DISCUSSION
DIVERSITY: CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS
ESTIMATED TIME: 50 MINUTES

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

To enhance cultural sensitivity and increase awareness of how individuals and their culture can be misunderstood.

OVERVIEW

Teachers can be better equipped to support culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities and their families if they have a good understanding of how culture affect the perceptions of others. This activity will show how easy it is to have negative perceptions of customs that seem foreign.

ACTIVITY

Read the below scenario and discuss the questions in class.

In a 1956 edition of *American Anthropologist*, an article by Horace Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema”, describes the “magical beliefs and practices” of a tribe supposedly observed by Miner in great detail and expresses concern about several of the group’s slightly masochistic tendencies. Some of the Nacirema customs include scraping and lacerating the face or legs with a sharp instrument, piercing the skin with sharp instruments and then taking great care to keep those holes from closing again, painting of the body, and inserting and ritualistically moving a bundle of hog hairs in the mouth several times a day. The people of this tribe seek the assistance of medicine men many times during the course of a year to treat physical ailments, release them from the power of devils that have lodged in their heads, and gouge holes in their teeth. (This last is done in the hopes of avoiding oral decay and offending one’s friends). The Nacirema gather in large numbers to watch clans within the tribe enact small battles, often with many physical injuries, and to observe individual tribal members fight to unconsciousness.

- Where do you think the Nacirema live?
- List at least ten adjectives to describe this tribe’s customs. How many were positive? Negative?
- If you were a teacher, how would you deal with Nacirema children in your classroom who insisted on maintaining their tribal customs?
- What does Nacirema spell backward?
- Describe everyday events such as shaving, ear piercing, and brushing teeth so that they do not sound like “primitive” customs.